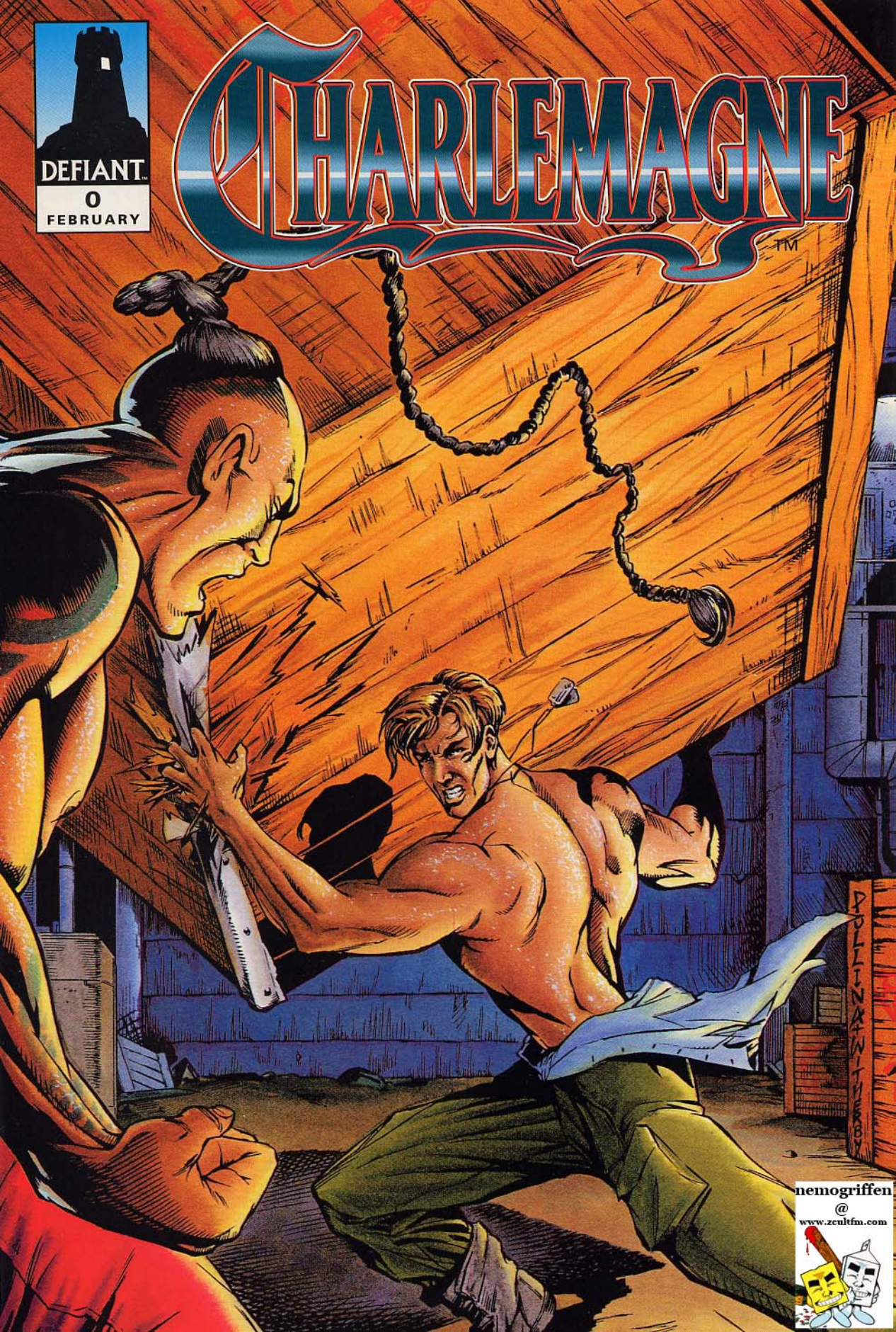
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FEBRUARY
CHARLEMAGNE
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Deborah Purcell
EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

Picture an isolation tank—picture yourself *inside* one. It's pitch-dark, and you're suspended in water, suspended in *time*... for you have no reference points whatsoever—visual, aural, tactile. You are completely cut off from your world. Your memory and your imagination are the only tools you have to link yourself to sanity—unless they drive you mad first.

This is how I think of the Vietnam experience. For years and years, scores of American men and women were cut off from their homes, their families, their lives. They were set adrift in a strange land. Like Giacometti sculptures, they were each starkly alone. Their pain was enormous, apocalyptic—yet they were isolated in a land completely across the world from their own, and no one was there to hear the sounds of their anguish.

Fifty-eight thousand body bags were used to encapsulate the dead... such ironic closure for those who had already, long before, been severed from everything that meant "life." And what of their coworkers and friends? Each was as fated as the dead: Some would complete a tour of duty; some would be captured by the V.C. and become P.O.W; some would end up M.I.A. Those who would live would not suffer the ignominy of inane death, yet the vast majority would either feel the ghastly string of American ingratitude or choke on the stench of their own nightmares.

I am haunted by this war, though I was not there, nor were any of my loved ones. Night after night I watched it flit by on the evening news, and though I was politically opposed, I didn't shed a tear. Tet, My Lai, the DMZ—everything was an abstraction. Was it because I had already experienced President Kennedy's death? And Dr. Martin Luther King's? And Bobby Kennedy's? And seen the Newark riots of 1964? And all the other riots of that tempestuous summer? Was a child of the '60s exposed to so many horrors that she became inured and impervious to "one more"?

Perhaps, for a time.

It didn't last.

Today, and for many years now, I have felt a gut-wrenching pain for the men and women who fought the war for us. I feel, too, compassion for the Vietnamese people and how they are faring. History has forever linked our countries together....

As you'll see, Phil Nutman and Adam Pollina have taken these thoughts and woven them into the fabric of a powerful and mesmerizing drama, with a lead character of extraordinary sensitivity and courage. His name is Charlemagne. You'll learn his history and his quest in issue #1, in March 1994. Meanwhile, we present to you a small but tantalizing preview... *CHARLEMAGNE* #0.

Deborah Purcell

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Editorial Director

DEFIANT

SNAKEDANCE

BANGKOK, THAILAND, JANUARY 11, 1994....
MISTER? MISTER?
HM? YOU MEAN ME?
WHY YOU WALK SO... SO...?
CREATED BY JIM SHOOTER AND DEBORAH PURCELL
WRITTEN BY JIM SHOOTER
PENCILED BY ADAM POLLINA
INKED BY MICHAEL WITHERBY
PAINTED BY BENJAMIN JUNG
LETTERED BY GEORGE ROBERTS
EDITED BY DEBORAH PURCELL

I'M... STILL LEARNING HOW... AGAIN.
YOU FIGHT GOOD, MISTER, YOU LIKE FIGHT, HUH?
NO.
I SAW YOU FIGHT. I WAS ON THE BOAT. I SAW YOU BUST UP A WHOLE MANY MEN. PIRATES. WITH GUNS!
HOW YOU GET SO STRONG AND BIG?

BIG, BIG. YOU HAVE STRONG FIGHT!
YOU WANT GO HOME... AMERICA! YOU FIGHT FOR GO HOME, HUH, MISTER?
YOU WANT PAPERS AND TICKET, OKAY? YOU FIGHT, YOU GET.!

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SOON...

THIS WAY. DOWN THIS ALLEY.

FIGURES.

HERE! INSIDE.

IF YOU'RE LEADING ME INTO A STICK-UP, YOU'RE CRAZY. I DON'T HAVE ANYTHING TO STEAL.

NO, NO. GO IN, PLEASE.

LOOK! THE BIG AMERICAN.

HEH! NOT BIG ENOUGH.

IS THAT YOUR SISTER?

YES.

HEY, MAN, YOU GOT A BUILT LIKE SCHWARTZENEGGER, YOU KNOW?

NO. WHO'S HE?

FUNNY, MAN.

HEY, HE *CAME*, MISTER NGU, SIR! SEE?

YOU THE BOSS HERE, MISTER NEW? TELL THEM TO LET HER GO.

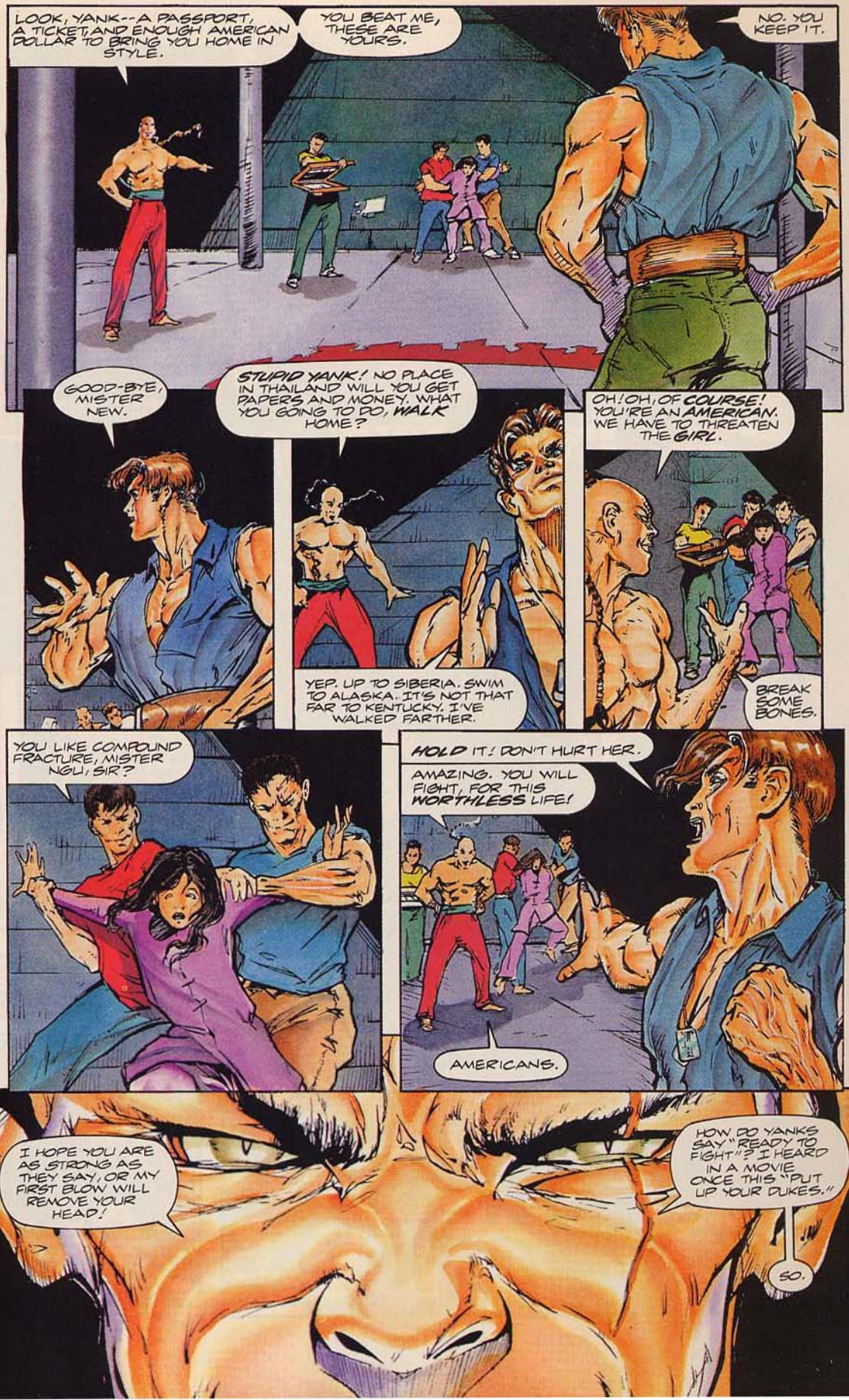
LET HER GO? BUT, OF COURSE. I AM A MAN OF MY WORD. IF YOU FIGHT, I GIVE HER BACK TO HER BROTHER.

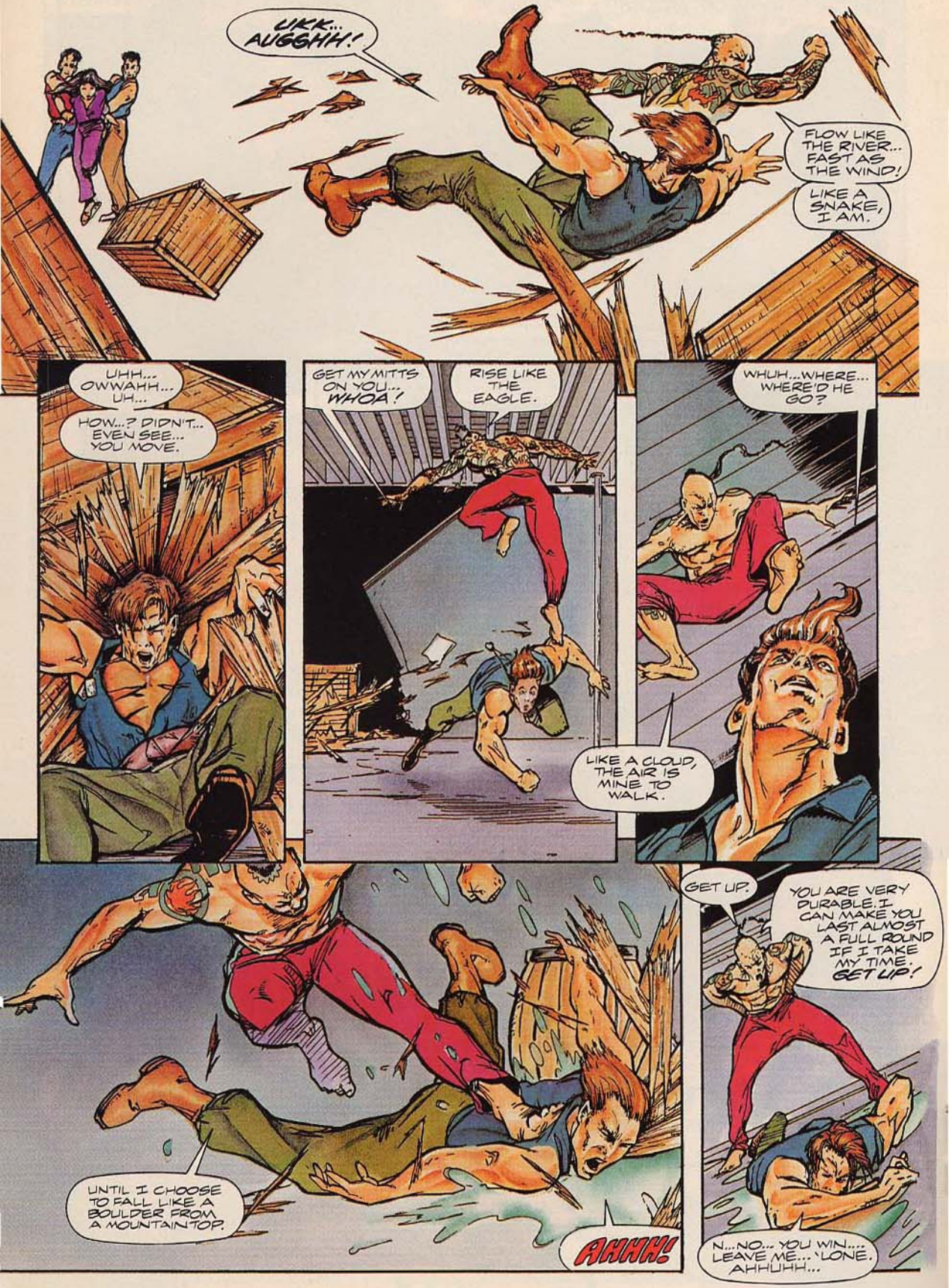
SHE'S TOO *PLAIN* TO BE OF ANY OTHER USE ANYWAY.

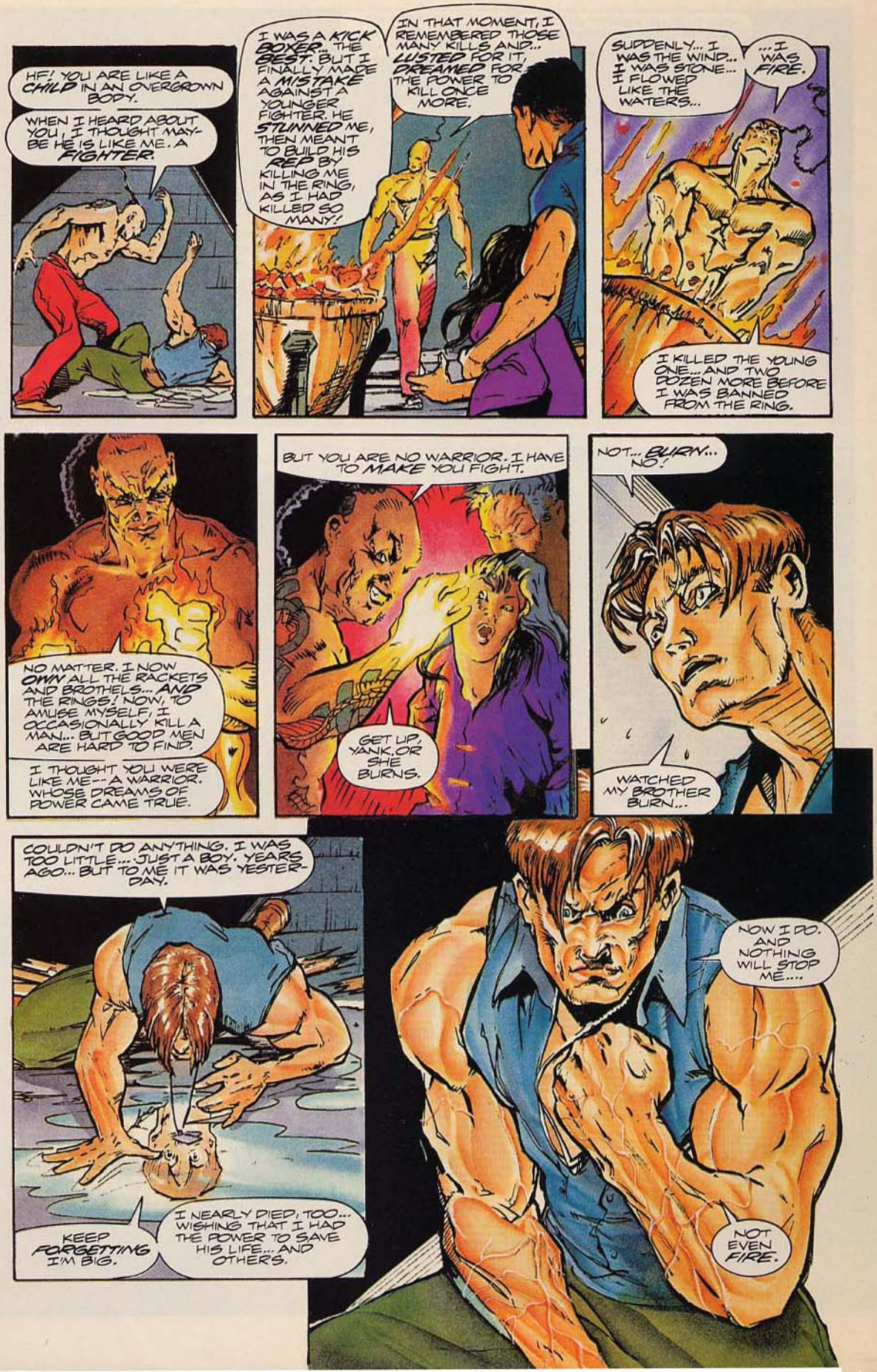
DON'T TELL ME *YOU* WANT HER?! FLAT CHEST, NO BUTT!

IF YOU FIGHT WELL, AND *IF* I DECIDE TO KEEP YOU ALIVE FOR ANOTHER WORKOUT...

...I'LL GIVE YOU YOUR *PICK* FROM MY BROTHELS.


LOOK, YANK--A PASSPORT, A TICKET, AND ENOUGH AMERICAN DOLLAR TO BRING YOU HOME IN STYLE.
YOU BEAT ME, THESE ARE YOURS.
NO. YOU KEEP IT.
GOOD-BYE, MISTER NEW.
STUPID YANK! NO PLACE IN THAILAND WILL YOU GET PAPERS AND MONEY. WHAT YOU GOING TO DO, WALK HOME?
YEP. UP TO SIBERIA. SWIM TO ALASKA. IT'S NOT THAT FAR TO KENTUCKY. I'VE WALKED FARTHER.
OH! OH, OF COURSE! YOU'RE AN AMERICAN. WE HAVE TO THREATEN THE GIRL.
BREAK SOME BONES.
YOU LIKE COMPOUND FRACTURE, MISTER NGU, SIR?
HOLD IT! DON'T HURT HER.
AMAZING. YOU WILL FIGHT, FOR THIS WORTHLESS LIFE!
AMERICANS.
I HOPE YOU ARE AS STRONG AS THEY SAY, OR MY FIRST BLOW WILL REMOVE YOUR HEAD!
HOW DO YANKS SAY "READY TO FIGHT"? I HEARD IN A MOVIE ONCE THIS "PUT UP YOUR DUKES."
SO.


UKK... AUGGHH!
FLOW LIKE THE RIVER... FAST AS THE WIND!
LIKE A SNAKE, I AM.
UHH... OWWAHH... UH...
HOW...? DIDN'T... EVEN SEE... YOU MOVE.
GET MY MITTS ON YOU... WHOA!
RISE LIKE THE EAGLE.
WHUH...WHERE... WHERE'D HE GO?
LIKE A CLOUD, THE AIR IS MINE TO WALK.
GET UP.
YOU ARE VERY DURABLE. I CAN MAKE YOU LAST ALMOST A FULL ROUND IF I TAKE MY TIME. GET UP!
UNTIL I CHOOSE TO FALL LIKE A BOULDER FROM A MOUNTAINTOP.
AHHH!
N...NO... YOU WIN... LEAVE ME... 'LONE. AHHUHH...


HF! YOU ARE LIKE A CHILD IN AN OVERGROWN BODY.
WHEN I HEARD ABOUT YOU, I THOUGHT MAYBE HE IS LIKE ME. A FIGHTER.
I WAS A KICK BOXER... THE BEST. BUT I FINALLY MADE A MISTAKE AGAINST A YOUNGER FIGHTER. HE STUNNED ME, THEN MEANT TO BUILD HIS REP BY KILLING ME IN THE RING, AS I HAD KILLED SO MANY!
IN THAT MOMENT, I REMEMBERED THOSE MANY KILLS AND... LUSTED FOR IT, DREAMED FOR THE POWER TO KILL ONCE MORE.
SUDDENLY... I WAS THE WIND... I WAS STONE... I FLOWED LIKE THE WATERS...
...I WAS FIRE.
I KILLED THE YOUNG ONE... AND TWO DOZEN MORE BEFORE I WAS BANNED FROM THE RING.
NO MATTER. I NOW OWN ALL THE RACKETS AND BROTHELS... AND THE RINGS! NOW, TO AMUSE MYSELF, I OCCASIONALLY KILL A MAN... BUT GOOD MEN ARE HARD TO FIND.
I THOUGHT YOU WERE LIKE ME -- A WARRIOR. WHOSE DREAMS OF POWER CAME TRUE.
BUT YOU ARE NO WARRIOR. I HAVE TO MAKE YOU FIGHT.
GET UP, YANK, OR SHE BURNS.
NOT... BURN... NO!
WATCHED MY BROTHER BURN...
COULDN'T DO ANYTHING. I WAS TOO LITTLE... JUST A BOY. YEARS AGO... BUT TO ME IT WAS YESTERDAY.
KEEP FORGETTING I'M BIG.
I NEARLY DIED, TOO... WISHING THAT I HAD THE POWER TO SAVE HIS LIFE... AND OTHERS.
NOW I DO. AND NOTHING WILL STOP ME....
NOT EVEN FIRE.

OH, THIS IS VERY GOOD. BETTER THAN HOPED FOR.
I WILL ROAST YOU SLOWLY... BLOW BY BLOW.
AHH!
I AM WIND AND FLAME!
PLEASED TO MEET YOU. I'M THE LITTLE ENGINE WHO COULD. IF I THINK I CAN...
...I CAN.
HO...!
UK!
I THOUGHT I MIGHT HAVE TO WAIT UNTIL YOU GOT TIRED, BUT IF YOU'RE GOING TO STAND THERE WITH YOUR MOUTH OPEN...
...I MIGHT AS WELL GRAB YOU.
HRHH!

WHICH ARE YOU NOW? STONE, FIRE, BLOWHARD...?
I AM NGU...
...SNAKE IN YOUR UGLY LANGUAGE.
UKK!
HAH!
SHOULDN'T HAVE JUMPED, SNAKE.
YOU'RE EASIER TO CATCH WHEN YOU'RE FLOATING LIKE A CLOUD...
...THAN WHEN YOU'RE FLOWING LIKE A SEA BREEZE OR WHATEVER.
AH! NICE SWING!
LIKE HANK AARON, I AM.

GET UP, SNAKE. GET UP!
WOW.
NEATO.
OKAY. LET HER GO.
STAY BACK, YANK, OR...
OR WHAT?
HOLD... HER!
SORRY, MISTER NGU....
GOOD DECISION.
TAKE YOUR BROTHER, AND GET OUT OF HERE, LADY!
SO. DO NOT THINK YOU HAVE WON, YANK. I STILL LIVE.
GONE. HOW DOES HE DO THAT?
IF YOU GUYS SEE NEW AGAIN, TELL HIM THANKS FOR THE TRIP HOME.
ACTUALLY, HE'LL PROBABLY KILL YOU TWO BEFORE YOU SEE HIM.
I'LL TELL HIM MYSELF. I KNOW I'LL SEE HIM AGAIN.
THE END, FOR NOW...